

A Sermon for the 13th Sunday after Pentecost-August 23, 2015

Church of the Epiphany, Richmond, Virginia

by David H. Knight, Interim Rector

In the Name of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Jesus said, ‘Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.’” John 6:56-59

You’ve heard the phrase, “You are what you eat.” It is a phrase that somehow has come down to us through a rather circuitous route. A man named Anthelme Brillat-Savarin wrote in 1826, “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.” In an essay titled *Concerning Spiritualism and Materialism*, Ludwig Andreas Fierbach wrote, “Man is what he eats.” While neither of these writers meant for their quotations to be taken literally, they were suggesting that the food one eats has a bearing on one’s state of mind and health.

And then, there are the beautiful words in Eucharistic Prayer I in our Prayer Book, written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1549, *“And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee that we and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one body with him, that he may dwell in us and we in him.”* These words certainly link partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ with our spiritual health if not our physical health as well. Eating the right foods, and taking the time to consume them in an unhurried manner is central to our health. Partaking in the sacrament of Holy Communion is central to our well being as members of Christ’s Body.

We are what we eat. If we eat junk food, our health is ultimately compromised. If we always eat on the run not taking time to relax over a meal, we will suffer from indigestion. We take on the character of what and how we eat. By this reasoning one might make this a possible connection; have you heard, for example, that gazelle is an exotic meat considered a delicacy in some parts of the world? As you know, one of the characteristics of the gazelle is that it is an animal that can travel very swiftly and can keep up a high rate of speed for some distance. The reasoning might follow then that if one were to eat gazelle, one could move very fast. There

was once a rumor circulating about town about the rector of Christ Church in Winchester, Virginia some time during the '80's. The rumor was that he was stopped on Interstate 66 in Front Royal for doing 80 in a 65 zone. When the officer asked for an explanation for his speeding, it was said that he told the officer that he was sorry but that he had eaten gazelle for lunch. Now part of that rumor is true; I was stopped for speeding.

It is true, though that we are what we eat. *“Jesus said, ‘Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.’”*

One of the insights that today's gospel reading gives us is that as we consume the body and blood of Christ, God is calling us to embrace his death and resurrection and to follow ourselves in the steps of his manner of living and dying for others. God is reminding us that our calling is more than skin deep. It reaches beneath the surface of our lives into our work places, our bank accounts, our family relationships, our eating habits, our daily schedules and all the ways we choose to live and die for Christ and for our neighbors. A healthy diet of food that is good for our bodies, and a discipline of eating that eating the spiritual food in an unhurried manner will improve our health on many levels.

To help grasp the significance of this passage we go back to a verse from last week's gospel reading that included verse 51 in which Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Jesus is the living bread that that came down from heaven to provide us with life to those who eat it. This is to dispel the notion that Jesus is simply a heavenly messenger who came to give us some new spiritual ideas. We take note in the fact that he was speaking in the future tense, His teaching and preaching was and always would be of great importance, yet his gift that we might live would be related to his crucified flesh. This why Holy Communion is so very central to our lives and our journeys as Christians. We are nourished at God's table. Christ feeds us so that he might dwell in us and we in him to use the ancient and ever timely words of Thomas Cranmer.

And so, for example, in the varied and many transitions of our lives, Christ feeds us with his body and blood. At baptism, at marriage, and at our death, Christ is present in the community as we gather, as well as each Sunday as we prepare to meet the coming week with all the challenges, uncertainties, and tasks that face us.

And as well, the Holy Eucharist puts our meals at home, whether we eat with family or whether we eat alone, into the context of a holy time. I well remember a man with whom I had lunch in his home one day. After he put the food on the table and we sat down, he offered grace. I said, “Sam, that was a beautiful grace.” Then he told me that even when he was alone, which he was

for most meals at home as his wife was in a nursing home, he always said grace out loud. He said he needed the stability of not taking his meals for granted. I sensed that this was a man whose physical as well as spiritual health was pretty much in tact. He also said he always tried not to hurry through his meals even though in retirement, he had a full and busy schedule. Are we willing to discipline ourselves to eating good food and to not hurrying as we eat?

The notion of not hurrying as we eat brings to mind what often seems to be a curious thing about our worship in church. There is somehow the notion among many Episcopalians that the service must last absolutely no longer than one hour! Why is it that we are willing to sit on a hard aluminum benches in a stadium for two to three hours to watch a baseball game or a football game, or stand for hours at a time following somebody in a golf tournament , yet we are not willing to be in church, air conditioned in the summer and heated in the winter, and spend an hour and seventeen minutes to care for the precious gift of our eternal life? A question worth pondering.

We are what we eat. "Jesus said, 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.'" And so as you come to God's table this morning, may you receive the nourishment you need to face this coming week with all its challenges. And may we offer and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable , holy, and living sacrifice unto God; humbly beseeching that we and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, and be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and made one body with him, that he may dwell in us and we in him." *Amen.*